Reading Remilia

"Banners", 2022

1.

The internet is rapidly becoming everything yet almost nobody writes about it. I haven't done much to fix this. I'm sorry. I was going to start by writing about Remilia, but I never wrote about Remilia, because I found writing about Remilia impossible without first writing about Miya. I then found writing about Miya impossible without first writing about the internet. But how can I write about the internet? The internet is *so* big. In GOD-AI, 01 said "neither listening nor reading (nor even scanning) are enough to follow what the Internet *is*." It would take a lifetime to view even a moment of content, and by then it will have been completely forgotten.

"One begins to ask what it means to read not any one text, not a text at all—nonreading as the fulfillment of technologies of attention and ignorance. Surfeit of content then reads itself off differently: leave it alone, allow content to work." Writing and reading are surgical operations. Nothing 'makes sense' before you cut off the parts that don't make sense. But the violence of writing is impotent against an ocean of undifferentiated content.

01's "nonreading" reveals posting or viewing online as an inverse operation with regard to

writing or reading. Pieces of content add together until the image becomes an approximation of reality [1]. Writing about the internet so often becomes babble because the timeline is babble – unstructured, unselfconscious, ephemeral. Countless obfuscating narratives exist around nearly every object of digital culture. Attempting to solidify this into a linear narrative is insane and probably beside the point. If you hack at the internet for so long that it becomes coherent, the result won't have any resemblance to reality.

Remilia, like the internet, was not made to be read, hence the difficulty in describing the project without schizoposting. The reader of the internet can only hope to collect enough pieces that they become one material again, like how the purity of sand might be discovered when moving from micro to macro scales – an endless universe of minerals and microorganisms becomes a singularity.

2.

> "People are always calling me a mirror and if a mirror looks into a mirror, what is there to see?"
>
> Andy Warhol, "The Philosophy of Andy Warhol." [2]

What distinguishes Remilia and Miya, like Warhol, is the self-conscious use of novel social forces for art production (and reproduction) [3]. As with Warhol, their methods are taken from outside art. The internet has always had tribes, and cults, and carnivals, and reality games. Much of Miya's thinking is years-old internet lore, understood on some level by anyone who went through the 4chan mind shredder as a teenager.

The primary problem of Remilia's art is the construction of a specific social reality. This reality surrounds the work, while creating the conditions for the work to emerge. The content of the work is interchangeable, its value lying in its potential to contribute to the primary social project, causing the work to be made of the climate surrounding itself (Barrett Avner called this "the return of the gesamtkunstwerk" [4]).

Remilia's art-as-cult is an inversion of Bourriard, for whom the art object is valued primarily for its impact potential within an interconnected global system. Bourriard's "micro-utopia" considered reality to be a result of the work. For Remilia's memetic project, this is reversed. The work is a result of the social-psychological machine surrounding it, whether it be the "Warholian groupchat", the free-associative algorithm arranging PFP assets, or the swarm consciousness of the user fandom.

The reality is the project, and the work serves to proliferate that reality. As such, the point of control lies in who is *in* and who is *out* – in addition to what kinds of things the 'memeplex' encourages. Focus shifts from the traditional artist's full control over the *product* of art to that of a sage ruler working with the social flows which result in art.

For over a year now, the problem of art and the internet is beginning to be reconciled. When Dean Kissick said the American pavilion at the Venice Biennale should have been simply a Milady, he wasn't kidding. Yet still nobody writes.

3.

For many, Remilia's appeal hinged on the cloud of whispers surrounding it. This air of secrecy, in which nothing about the organization or its members was fully revealed, created a space in which everything was true. Remilia's jovial approach to reality, quintessentially online, shares commonalities with Bahktin's writing on Rabelais and the medieval carnival. Both archetypal internet and carnival emerged in a time of violent social transition; they are spaces of improvisation without boundaries between performers and audience; they are festive 'second lives'; they are determined by autonomous rulings that serve as foils to everyday life; they use inverted constructions of normative community identity and structure.

Milady Maker and most other objects of digital culture are examples of Bahktin's "grotesque image", an image which contains its own inverse. The grotesque image exaggerates and comments on reality without the simplification found in satire or other forms of criticism. Bahktin finds in the grotesque "a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out', of the 'turnabout', of a continual shifting from top to bottom, front to rear…humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" [5]. Milady Maker was built of these kinds of images: alternately white-hearted and violent, savior and psyop, art collective and cult. The whole internet is like this. Always both. I can never decide if it's the worst or best thing to ever happen.
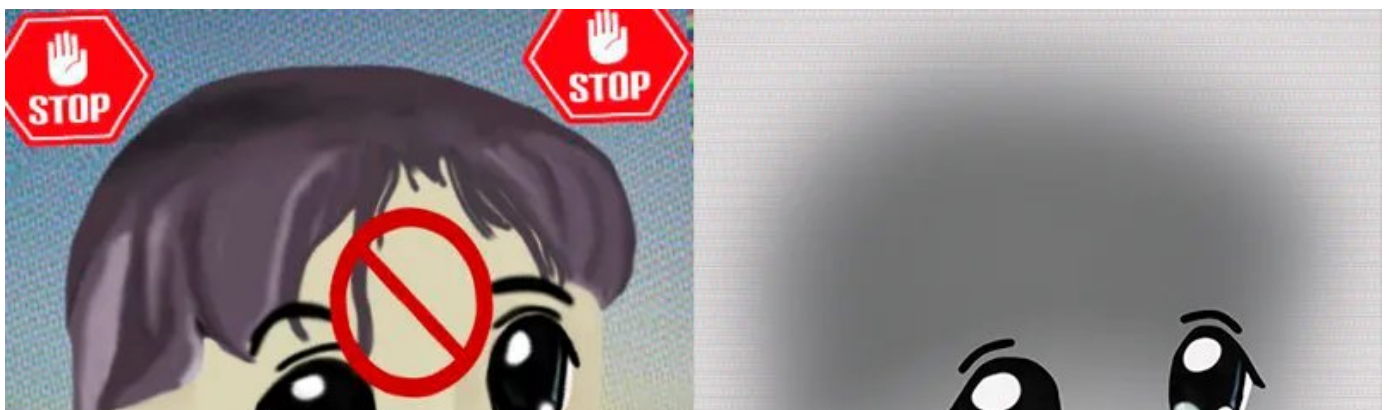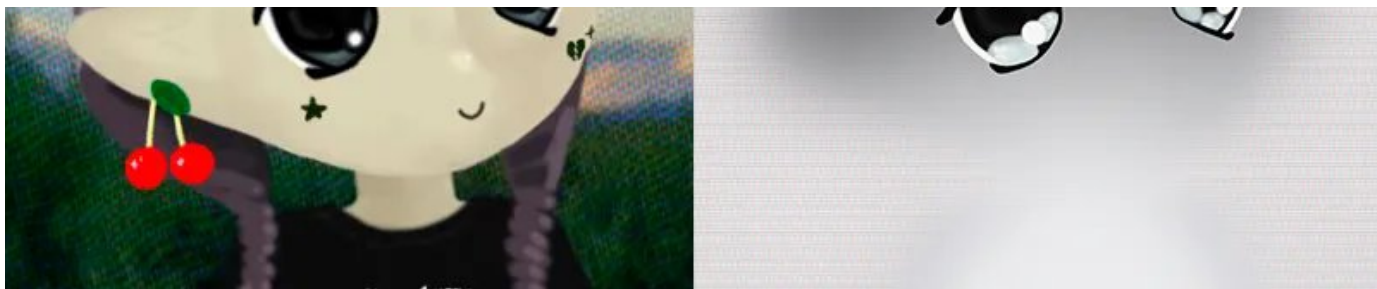
Left: Milady canceled. Right: Milady ascended.

Cancellation, when applied to a digital image, is the result of a collision between grotesque imagery and mainstream expectations of stable meaning. Cancellation, like writing, stabilizes the grotesque image by discarding contradictory elements. A nuanced polyvalent image quickly becomes singularly evil. Milady Maker's ascension into a pure "aura" form at the point of cancellation was equally part of this violence, as the community split into "all bad" / "all good" factions. Charlotte Fang's whitewashing of their previous projects on an episode of Contain, by attempting to strip away negative imagery, in effect reinforced cancellation's desire for stability [6].

The internet is not all white-hearted and everyone knows it. The social forces at play online, studied in detail by Miya, are incredibly dangerous. 4chan's grotesque /soc/ board – which some associated Miya with during cancellation – was only an exaggeration of what is now typical. The images distributed during cancellation are terrifying in part because the utterly mutable micro-lolcow archetype described in them is normal now. The identity creation online is almost always exploitative. The networked subject has no agency. Its personality is groomed. Its thoughts are planted. [7]

If this is true, why not log off? For Remilia, there is no withdrawal from the internet, no turning the ship around. For those who recognize this power, the only non-suicidal option is to use it. After all, despite everything the internet is *beautiful*. It's reality, and it's good. Focusing on the internet's negative aspects just isn't telling the whole story.

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1 "Content" is work generated by artificial intelligence. Its origin, as either human- or machine-made, is made irrelevant by the process of algorithmic optimization which guides each modality towards an identical result. Humans can produce content, but as that same content is produced much more efficiently by a machine, producing effectively involves acting as if you were not human. In a world driven by content, traditional (human-consciousness-driven) artforms are a great deal of effort to produce middling results. What's the point of painting to post on instagram?

2 Warhol's "autobiography" was almost entirely ghostwritten by various Factory members.

3   Does this self-consciousness make it more or less valid? It could be argued that Remilia's mimetic project is fundamentally nostalgic. It can only exist in this way because true uncontrolled internet phenomena have been rendered inconsequential post-January 6. Despite a "commitment to post-authorship", Remilia seem interested in a new kind of authorship which emerges from the mechanics of content. Nothing today is authored in the sense that pre-internet work was authored, rendering a term like "post-authorship" confusing.

4   Like the gesamtkunstwerk, the memetic project constructs a defined space in opposition to what might be considered exterior reality. Unlike the gesamtkunstwerk, the memetic project is open-ended, outside of the control of a central artist-author, and extends beyond its physical limits into the social / psychological space surrounding it. Barrett's tweet quoted here has since been deleted.

5   Every internet ideology contains the carnival's inversions. Everything in the news is fake. The Pope is not Catholic. Being redpilled is so normal now you see this kind of thinking on CNN.

6   The "anthropological" stance typically used when commenting on digital culture is an unspoken form of cancellation. The artist removes themselves from the subject matter (in which they participate) to keep their own identity intact: separate from the swarm and rendered in a singular light.

7   This is a common theme for Miya, for whom it applies universally. 01 describes the "angelic" networked subject as becoming-universal, rather than fragmenting off some kind of disintegrating mainstream. Under this framework, there are no real "dark forests". Proana, rationalist, gainer, furry, fetish, alt-political (left and right), BAPist, transgender and bodybuilding communities accelerate together (along with everyone else) toward a single point. It's important to note that this 'grooming' isn't usually driven by anyone. It just happens.

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4 Comments

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i hope u write more and more

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